



DC Developmental Disabilities Council

Comments for the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development

FY19-20 Oversight for the DC Office of Human Resources

The DC Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) seeks to strengthen the voice of people with developmental disabilities and their families in DC in support of greater independence, inclusion, empowerment, and the pursuit of life as they choose. We strive to create change that eliminates discrimination and removes barriers to full inclusion through our advocacy. We are writing today to encourage DC Human Resources (DCHR)'s work toward becoming a model employer of people with disabilities.

We are pleased to see the recent launch of the Call for Hire program to get more veterans and their spouses employed in DC government. We recognize the unemployment rate among veterans is higher than the national average and that veterans face multiple barriers to employment because of their experiences and status as veterans. Removing barriers to employment is a justice issue and we support any programs that do this for groups that have historically been overlooked and undervalued.

There are many commonalities between the disability community and the veteran community, and like veterans, the disability community also experiences unemployment at much higher rates than the national average. In 2018, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the unemployment rate of people with disabilities was 8%, which is more than double the national average of 3.7%. Further, the number of people with disabilities who are not in the labor force at all (i.e., neither employed nor receiving unemployment) is about 80%.¹ According to the latest National Core Indicators for DC, 35% of respondents who did not have a job said that they would like a paid job in the community.² We would like to see more people with disabilities have opportunities like the Call for Hire program and believe this framework could be easily adapted to the disability community.

We envision this operating in a similar fashion to the federal government's Schedule A program, which has proven to be highly successful in increasing the number of people with disabilities contributing their skills and talents to the federal workforce. In a blog post from

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

² National Core Indicators (2016-2017). Washington, DC Report.
<https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/states/DC/>



2015, the then-Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Beth Cobert, said that there were more people with disabilities working for the federal government than had ever previously been recorded since they started collecting disability data.³

The District is well positioned to create an excepted service hiring program for people with disabilities. We are fortunate to have the DC Office of Disability Rights to advise and support DC government agencies in making reasonable accommodations and we also acknowledge increased collaboration in recent years between DCHR and the Rehabilitation Services Administration. However, while the District is taking steps toward becoming a model employer of people with disabilities, progress is very slow and there is significant work to be done.

Being a model employer of people with disabilities would involve both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 22.9% of DC residents have some kind of disability.⁴ Right now, the District government does not know the percentage of people with disabilities that it employs. Disability disclosure is a personal choice for each individual, but if the District does not offer an opportunity for disclosure for the purposes of data collection, then we are doing the disability community a disservice. Further, if we are not collecting qualitative information about how current employees with disabilities fare, then we cannot identify the strengths that these individuals bring to workplaces, what the city is doing well, and barriers to becoming a model employer.

In summary, we have three recommendations for DCHR to establish itself as a model employer of people with disabilities:

1. Collect disability data by creating an opportunity for current DC government employees to self-disclose a disability if they choose.
2. Develop a process to receive and act on feedback from DC government employees with disabilities about their experiences of being a worker with a disability.
3. Modify the Call for Hire program to create a hiring authority for people with disabilities.

We would welcome any questions or opportunities to collaborate on making these recommendations a reality. DDC Executive Director, Alison Whyte, may be reached at alison.whyte@dc.gov or 202-727-8005.

³ Cobert, B. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.opm.gov/blogs/Director/2015/10/13/Meeting-the-Presidents-Challenge-to-Hire-People-with-Disabilities/> on February 24, 2020.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Division of Human Development and Disability. Disability and Health Data System (DHDS) Data [online]. [accessed Feb 24, 2020]. URL: <https://dhds.cdc.gov>